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CPYRGHT

TO ERR IS SENATORIAL

SEN. MIKE MANSFIELD of Montana, Democratic leader in the Senate, qualifies as something of a Capitol Hill philosopher for several reasons, not the least of which being that, in moments of meditation, he smokes a pipe. Moreover, the senator speaks occasionally in profound observation on both senatorial and human nature. He did so the other day when the Senate foreign relations committee officially forgave Richard M. Helms, director of the Central Intelligence agency, for his ill-advised letter criticizing Sen. J. William Fulbright. Said Senator Mansfield:

"None of us is perfect. Hell, we all make mistakes. If we had to resign when we make mistakes, the whole Senate would have to resign."

It is evident that Helms made a mistake, and a rehearsal of history recent and ancient would point out some of the congressional errors to which Senator Mansfield referred. It is quite true, moreover, that in many instances the voters, without necessarily claiming any quality of divinity, have forgiven their wayward senators or at least forgotten their mistakes by the time the next election rolled around. Perhaps that is one of the advantages of the 6-year term and one reason many House members would like to have a 4-year term.

So Mansfield was quite correct in his observation. Under the circumstances, the Senate committee certainly proved magnanimous. We will assume that Helms, in so sensitive a post, has profited by this mistake and will restrain his letter-writing tendencies in the future. With the pressure on, he frankly admitted his error, voiced his regret and apologized. Whether the average senator, similarly imperfect and similarly prone to error, would be so quick to confess error and mend his ways is quite another question.